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**From:** Dunn, Alexandra [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=426D0177EAAB4001A5C85F051565997E-DUNN, ALEXA]  
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<http://www.capecodtimes.com/news/20180625/regional-environmental-chief-visits-cape-cod>

## **Regional environmental chief visits Cape Cod**

By Doug Fraser

Posted Jun 25, 2018 at 7:05 PM Updated at 6:32 AM

HYANNIS — Jack Clarke, director of public policy and government relations for the Massachusetts Audubon Society, is happy with at least one thing Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt has done: the appointment in January of Alexandra Dapolito Dunn as the agency's regional administrator for New England.

"From the environmental community point of view we couldn't have done any better than with her appointment," said Clarke.

"I think we won the lottery," said Bradley Campbell, the president of the Conservation Law Foundation when asked about Dunn at a meeting last week with the Times.

Dunn is an environmental attorney with roots in Massachusetts. With two decades of experience in environmental law, she has served as counsel to the American Chemistry Council, dean of Environmental Law Programs at Pace University, and chairwoman of the American Bar Association's environment, energy and resources section. She most recently served as executive director of the Environmental Council of the States, and Campbell credited her with remaking the organization into a "constructive, nonpartisan voice addressing the most significant environmental issues facing our states and our nation."

But Dunn took over as the regional representative of what is widely considered to be one of the most anti-environment and anti-EPA administrations in decades, led by Pruitt's anti-science, anti-climate change rhetoric, and an agenda that includes threats of dismantling the agency through personnel cuts and attempts at rolling back Obama-era regulations.

“The question is, how will she work with her boss and the New England states that have high standards on air, land and water quality?” Clarke said.

Dunn sat down with the Times editorial board last week to give her perspective on how the agency will help the Cape and Islands, and New England deal with some of the most fundamental problems we’ve faced in generations: climate change, wastewater and superfund cleanups, and emerging contaminants that endanger our water supplies. But first, she addressed the political question by saying the nine regional administrators, including her, were chosen for their deep connections to the states they work with; their job is to help states attack the problems they see as their top priorities.

“Much of our work is not politically motivated, but is motivated by the actual environmental problems we are facing,” Dunn said. “Those priorities have not changed.”

She broached the idea of cooperative federalism, an idea championed by Pruitt as a collaborative approach emphasizing transparency and public participation.

“I think that what is a little bit different about how this administration is approaching it is that the conversation is being led by the states as opposed to what you had under the prior administration where it was very heavily federally led,” Dunn said.

Dunn pointed out that Massachusetts is committed to meeting carbon dioxide reductions laid out by the Obama administration in the 2015 Clean Power Act, despite President Donald Trump’s executive order last year undermining it. At that signing, Pruitt referenced the EPA’s core mission as “protecting public health while also being pro-energy independence.”

But there’s a separation between the political machinations of policy making in Washington and the day-to-day work in the regional offices, Dunn said.

“We are listening to the states,” she said, stressing that not every region puts climate change at the top of its list or experiences it as directly as do the coastal states.

New England states are dominated by ocean and river coastlines, both experiencing flooding through an increase in extreme rain events and the combination of sea rise and changes in storm intensity and frequency. If states request help, the EPA will respond, Dunn said.

“That’s the conversation that needs to happen when we’re asked to help,” she said. “We need to build, fund, resilient infrastructure for our communities.”

Layoffs at the EPA and projected budget cuts in other regions have not affected New England, she said. Her office has retained its scientific staff and is the only region hiring more scientists due to retirements of career personnel, she said.

“None of their expertise has left the agency,” she said.

Dunn said she doesn’t see the morale issues reported among EPA staffers working under an administration reportedly hostile to their mission.

“People were almost fearful that their project or work would be changed, reprioritized or not valued, or that there would be a sign, a turn in direction,” Dunn said. “I can say, almost to a one, that none of our projects have changed significantly because they are very ground level work.”

Dunn said Pruitt’s priorities include Superfund site cleanups and regulating emerging contaminants like per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, known as PFAS. They are a group of man-made chemicals used by a number of industries globally since the 1940s, which have been found locally in drinking water supplies, particularly in Hyannis, and around Joint Base Cape Cod and the Barnstable County Fire Rescue Training Academy, linked to the use of firefighting foam. Testing indicates the chemicals may have reproductive and developmental effects, and cause tumors.

But Pruitt has a checkered history in dealing with emerging contaminants and Superfund sites. Last year, he created a Superfund Task Force that was criticized for having no criteria for admission, for not keeping minutes, and was perceived as producing an industry-friendly report. But he also took action on a couple of cleanups that had languished and meted out stricter measures than the agency had recommended.

Joint Base Cape Cod and New Bedford Harbor are on the priority list but not on the expedited cleanup list.

Earlier this year, Politico reported that Pruitt and his EPA staff responded to a White House request and helped block publication of a Health and Human Services report showing that PFAS contaminants were toxic at much lower levels than what the EPA had estimated. Reporters were also barred from an EPA meeting on emerging contaminants last month in Washington.

But Dunn said the EPA is listening. EPA New England is hosting a PFAS community engagement forum in Exeter, New Hampshire, that started Monday and continues Tuesday.

“We wanted to create a place where the community could be heard and give input into a national management plan,” Dunn said.

The meeting is open to the press and anyone who wants to give comments to the agency. The goal of the management plan will be to evaluate PFAS as a hazardous substance, set a limit on contaminant levels and make it regulatory, and develop toxicity levels for groundwater.

Responding to criticisms that a Pruitt-led EPA would be lax on enforcement, Dunn said EPA New England’s enforcement office continues regardless of the change in administration. She said her regional office is unique in combining enforcement with compliance assistance and pollution prevention to get at the root cause of violations. Education, she said, could insure greater compliance than penalties.

“The water runs through people’s souls here,” Dunn said of the Bay State. “We are finding ways to look at improving water quality so that the economy stays strong whether it is fishing, or tourism or outdoor activities.”

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